

Tour Report

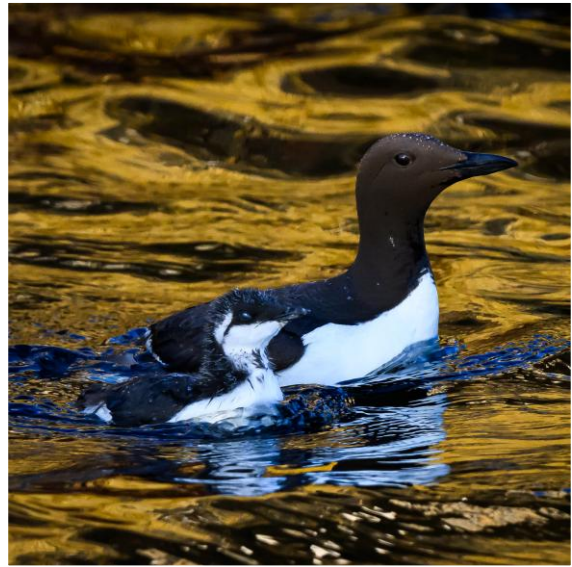
The Farnes and Northumberland in Early Summer

23-28 June 2025

Black-legged kittiwake



Common guillemot



Atlantic puffin



Bottlenose dolphin



Compiled by Martin Kitching

A warm and windy week on the Northumberland coast with bottlenose dolphins from the east coast inshore population putting in a couple of appearances, and early wader passage is evident.

Monday 23 June 2025

Day 1:

Newton Links and the Long Nanny Estuary

Partly cloudy, 18°C (felt like 11°C), 25mph W (gusting to 45mph)

After everyone had checked in at the Bamburgh Castle Inn, we took a short drive down the coast to the tern colony at the Long Nanny. The walk from the car park through dunes bedecked with lady's bedstraw, common restharrow, northern marsh orchid, pyramidal orchid, bird's foot trefoil, common dog rose, rosebay willowherb, white campion, and bloody cranesbill was accompanied by an exultation of skylarks singing and soaring on a stiffening breeze. Stonechat and reed bunting perched briefly, meadow pipits were remarkably obliging and swifts, swallows, house martins, and sand martins were all hawking insects over the dunes. Arctic terns were struggling in the wind as they brought food back to hungry chicks popping out of the marram grass next to the NT warden's hut, and the returning American black tern was roosting in the estuary mouth as a little tern raced past us and out to sea, where gannets could be seen distantly heading north. Back at the car park, house sparrows were dust-bathing, and blackbirds, song thrushes, linnets, pied wagtails and goldfinches all joined the trip list.

Tuesday 24 June 2025

Day 2:

River Coquet, East Chevington NWT, Coquet Island, Hauxley NWT

Partly cloudy, 18°C, 15mph W

We headed down the coast after breakfast and, after stopping to admire a recently harvested field filled with lapwings, curlews and oystercatchers, we arrived at the Northumberland Wildlife Trust reserve at East Chevington. Just over 30 years ago this was a surface (open cast) mine, but now there are two reed-fringed pools with waders, wildfowl and reedbed species. Marsh harriers were seen as we drove along the access road, and an array of waterbirds included grey heron, little grebe, great crested grebe, mallard, gadwall, tufted duck, shelduck, mute swan, Canada goose and greylag goose were accompanied by an aural backdrop of willow warbler, reed bunting and cetti's warbler as a common buzzard soared distantly, moorhen and coot patrolled the muddy edges, a breeding-plumaged dunlin was sharing the mud with lapwings, a common cuckoo flew between bushes in the dunes, and a roe deer was feeding in a reedbed.

A few miles back up the coast the weir on the river Coquet, between Amble and Warkworth was a productive stop, with a stock dove in a flock of wood pigeons, lapwings chasing common redshank, female common eider and cormorant constantly diving in search of food, skylark and meadow pipit in song-flight, and some impressive leaps from Atlantic Salmon.

Lunch from the Amble Harbour Village was sausage rolls for some of us, pies for the others, then it was time to board Glad Tidings III for a trip with Puffin Cruises. We weren't even out of the river mouth when bottlenose dolphins appeared all around us and we could still see them heading away south 20 mins later while we were making the crossing towards Coquet Island. Puffins were there in abundance; sitting on the sea, and flying out from the cliffs or flying back in with food. Guillemots were around, even though they don't breed on the island, and we saw two of the four islands' breeding pairs of razorbill. Common, Arctic, sandwich, and the rare roseate terns, at their only regular UK breeding colony, were all seen and black-legged kittiwake and northern fulmar were on their nest ledges, while in the sea below, curious grey seals bobbed up to look at us as we passed.

Back on dry land, our final location for the day was another NWT reserve, this time Hauxley with the luxury of toilets and a café. The short walk along a track lined with ragged robin, teasel, cow parsley, dog rose, and a scattering of orchids, brought us the feeding station and bullfinch, chaffinch, goldfinch, tree sparrow, great tit and blue tit before it was time to head back north to Seahouses.

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Wednesday 25 June 2025

Day 3:

Howick, Belford Moor, and the Farne Islands

Partly cloudy, 18°C, 15mph SSE

We headed south along the coast again, this time to the clifftop footpath in the shadow of Earl Grey's Bathing House at Howick. Brown hares were chasing each other in the fields and oystercatchers were calling noisily from the rocks on the water's edge. Razorbills and black-legged kittiwakes were flying out to sea or returning with food for hungry chicks, and northern fulmars were soaring along the clifftop just over our heads. Skylark song carried on the breeze and a song-flighting common whitethroat landed and was flitting around the bushes along the path as large white, green-veined white, speckled wood and red admiral butterflies, and a plethora of hoverflies were nectaring. After a lunch stop in Bamburgh, we headed a short distance inland to Belford Moor. Linnets were calling, chiffchaff, chaffinch and meadow pipit were singing and a distant carrion crow, perched high in a conifer plantation, required the telescope for confirmation of its identity. As we drove back down towards Belford, a song thrush had eschewed the luxury of an anvil, preferring instead the simple workbench of the tarmac in the middle of the road. Astonishingly, when we arrived back in Seahouses, ahead of an early meal and a sunset cruise around the Farne Islands, another song thrush was breaking a snail, but this time on the kerb in our parking bay!

After an early dinner at the Bamburgh Castle Inn we boarded Serenity III for a sunset cruise. A red-breasted merganser in the harbour was an addition to the trip list. Then we were only a few minutes from the harbour when the first Atlantic puffins, razorbills and common guillemots appeared and as we neared the inner group of islands lines of them were flying back with food. The cliffs were a hive of activity, including black-legged kittiwakes with young ranging in size from tiny all the way to more than half-grown. Around the pinnacles on Staple Island, the sea was a mass of birds including lots of common guillemot adult/chick pairs, and we watched a few chicks taking their first leap into the unknown, including one that was given a ducking by dad before paddling away into the sunset. Sadly, like a scene from a natural history documentary, a fledgling, separated from its parent, was grabbed by a great black-backed gull and carried off. The harsh reality of life, playing out in front of us with the noise, movement, and smell of the seabird colony assaulting all of the senses.

Thursday 26 June 2025

Day 4:

Coneygarth (Bothal Pond), Wansbeck Riverside, Attlee Park, Cresswell, Druridge Pools

Partly cloudy, 21°C, 25mph SW

Our first stop was Coneygarth, a fishing pond on the western edge of Ashington. Pochard, tufted duck, mallard, wigeon, gadwall, moorhen, coot, little grebe, and great crested grebe were all on the water below a busy mass of hirundines and swifts as a flock of lapwing took to the air in panic at an unseen, at least by us, menace.

Along the River Wansbeck at Sheepwash, a roe deer and fawn were in rough pasture above the opposite bank, grey wagtails were exploring tangles of dead wood along the water's edge, mute swans were shadowing their cygnets and nuthatch, blackcap, linnet, goldfinch and goldcrest were all singing.

The riparian woodland of the River Blyth at Attlee Park had grey wagtail fledglings along the river, and an impressive roving tit flock of mainly juvenile birds had lots of long-tailed tits, blue tits and coal tits, smaller numbers of great tit, and three fellow-travellers: goldcrest, treecreeper, and nuthatch.

After lunch at the Drift Café, we travelled the short distance to Cresswell Pond where 27 pied avocets gave a hard time to any corvid or grey heron that flew by. A little egret stalked through the shallows past a mixed roost of common redshank, oystercatcher, curlew and lapwing, as little grebe constantly dived and tree sparrow and reed bunting called from the reeds in front of us.

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Our final stop for the day was Druridge Pools, a Northumberland Wildlife Trust reserve on the site of an old surface (open-cast) mine. The main pool was very quiet, but the rushy marsh to the south had curlew, lapwing, common redshank, black-tailed godwit, spoonbill, common snipe, and an extraordinary seven wood sandpipers. A spoonbill was sleeping (do they really ever do much other than that?) as a marsh harrier drifted over and sedge warbler, willow warbler and chiffchaff sang from the bushes along the track to the hides.

Friday 27 June 2025

Day 5:

Holy Island of Lindisfarne

Cloudy, 20°C, 20mph SW gusting to 30mph

Heading north after breakfast, a common buzzard was quartering fields along the minor road to the A1. Once on the island, we started with scanning the harbour which was almost all exposed mud. At least seventy bar-tailed godwits, with a few in full summer plumage, thirty red knots, three common ringed plovers and a couple of curlews were probing along the water's edge as twenty red-breasted mergansers patrolled the shallows just a few metres beyond them. Stonechat and reed bunting were in rough grassland where a roe deer was feeding, as skylark and meadow pipit were song-fighting in a stiff breeze and, with several guests opting for cultural exploration of the village, a truncated group headed out past the Gertrude Jeckyl garden and to the island's eastern edge. Grey seals were bottling just offshore, northern gannets were heading away from their breeding colony on the Bass Rock and towards rich hunting grounds further south. The lough had sedge and reed warblers singing, little grebe with chicks, mute swans with eight cygnets, mallards with ducklings, and the mallards were visibly agitated. With all of the birds staring intently around, it seemed likely that an otter was active somewhere in the maze of channels. It lifted its head briefly out of the water then disappeared behind the reeds for half an hour before suddenly surfacing in open water! After traversing the pool a couple of times it headed straight towards us down one edge of the reeds before a final dive out of sight right in front of us. It was time to head back into the village for lunch, and as we retraced our steps along the eastern edge of the island, a large well-dispersed group of bottlenose dolphins was heading south ~800m offshore. Lunch was a bit later than anticipated!

Crossing the causeway as the rising tide steadily approached, a kestrel was hovering over the dunes at the western end of the island and little egret and curlew were feeding close to the road, then back on the mainland we drove down the dead-end road to Fenham Low Moor, adding rabbit and brown hare for the mammal list for the day.

Saturday 28 June 2025

Day 6:

Budle Bay and Monk's House Pool

Partly cloudy, 19°C, 14mph NNW

After everyone had checked out of the hotel we had a short drive north to Budle Bay. The eerie cries of curlew carried across the mudflats, oystercatchers, common redshank, shelduck, and mallard were feeding and common merganser were in the channel as little egrets stalked through the shallows. Heading back towards Seahouses, we stopped at Monk's House Pool. Great black-backed, lesser black-backed and herring gulls were obligingly close to each other, allowing comparison of ID features, moorhen, coot and little grebe were patrolling the margins, little ringed plovers were running along the muddy edge, swifts and hirundines were swooping to drink and - a constant throughout the week - skylark and meadow pipit were in full song as we returned to Seahouses for the final time.

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Checklist for The Farnes & Northumberland in Early Summer



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
	BIRDS							
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓		
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓		✓		
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
4	Common shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓		
6	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓		✓		
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓		✓		
9	Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓		
10	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		✓		
11	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓	✓		✓	
12	Common merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>						✓
13	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓		✓	
14	Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		✓				
15	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓			✓	✓
17	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓		✓		
18	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				✓		
19	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
21	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	European shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓		✓	
23	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓		
24	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓		✓	✓	
25	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
26	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓

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27	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓		
29	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>					✓	
31	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>						✓
32	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>					✓	
34	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓		
35	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓		
36	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
37	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓			
38	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					✓	
39	Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					✓	
40	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓				
41	Black-legged kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓	✓			
42	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓					
48	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>		✓				
49	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓		✓	
50	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓			
51	American black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger surinamensis</i>	✓					
52	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓			
53	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓			
54	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓			
55	Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓			
56	(Feral) Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓				
58	Common wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Common cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓				

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61	Common swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
63	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Western jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				✓		
68	Eurasian blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
69	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓		
70	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H				
75	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓		
76	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓		H		
77	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	H	H	✓	
78	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		H		H	✓	
79	Eurasian reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					H	
80	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H		H		
81	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	
82	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				H		
83	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	H	H	✓	✓	H
84	Eurasian nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓		
85	Eurasian treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				H		
86	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓	H	H	
89	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓		✓		
90	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓			✓	✓	
91	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓		✓		
93	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		H		✓	✓	
94	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓		

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95	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	European rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>					✓	
98	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	H	✓	✓	
99	Eurasian bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓		H		
100	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
102	Common reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	MAMMALS							
1	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					✓	
2	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓		✓	
3	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓			✓	
4	European roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
5	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	✓		✓	
6	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
	BUTTERFLIES							
1	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓		✓		
2	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>				✓		
3	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>				✓		
4	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>		✓				
5	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓		✓		
6	Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>				✓		
7	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓		✓		
8	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>		✓				
	MOTHS							
1	Six spot burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>	✓					
2	Narrow-bordered five-spot burnet	<i>Zygaena lonicerae</i>	✓					
3	Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	✓					